**Knots that Bind**

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# Knots that Bind

by fancywaffles


Summary

Original Luo Binghe bullied the universe into giving him his own nice Shizun (his third wife's cousin), which once he accepted the fact, has made his life immeasurably better.

(or, domestic epilogue and original binghe flashbacks for unbound silk)


Notes

This an OG!Binghe POV (+epilogue) bonus chapter for Unbound Silk that may not make sense without having read it first.

But brief summary: Shen Yuan transmigrated as Sha Hualing's cousin who ended up tutoring OG!Luo Binghe's kids. Post visiting SVSSS-verse in the extra, he and Luo Binghe became friends. Then Luo Binghe realized Sha Yuan was the same as the kind Shizun he wanted and had a complete existential meltdown that Sha Yuan fixed by flicking him in the forehead. They got married and Luo Binghe culled a lot of his harem (but not all of them for political reasons mostly).

The conceit for the scene breaks is just for fun, unless you want to imagine Sha Yuan getting random System notifications while his husband does the JD from Scrubs head lean and has flashbacks.

Only content warning is vague allusions to canon abuses LBH suffered in PIDW.

See the end of the work for more notes

Luo Binghe glanced over at the sleeping form of his husband, the now familiar view still not having lost its charm. Sha Yuan had forgotten to do anything with his hair before he went to bed so it was a tangled mess that would need to be washed. It meant Luo Binghe could take him to the baths this morning, spread his fingers through the smooth strands and luxuriate in the simplicity of how relaxed Sha Yuan always was when he carded his fingers through it.

He kissed his husband's bare shoulder and smiled at the answering grumble of annoyance.

"It's morning," Luo Binghe pointed out.

"Your morning and my morning are very different," Sha Yuan groused, face still half into his own pillow.

Luo Binghe hummed and moved some of the long mess of hair that was blanketing the side of Sha Yuan's face. He traced his finger over the slope and pointed tip of his husband's ear and lowered his voice. "This Lord will make his husband breakfast."

Sha Yuan's eyes cracked open very slightly, the darkness of them hidden by even darker eyelashes, but the easy affection impossible to hide. "This husband is amenable."

Luo Binghe leaned down and kissed him, laughing as Sha Yuan protested 'morning breath' before inevitably giving in kissing him back more deeply.

It was… not such a morning he could have fathomed even a few years ago.

**[Protagonist has started the quest 'Earn What You Yearned' Memories Loading…]**

Luo Binghe laid on his back, staring up at the black gauzy canopy of his bed. He'd fucked eleven different men so far and none of them had felt worth actually sleeping next to. There was not much they could do if he had been asleep so it wasn't as if he was frightened, but old habits died hard and his inability to sleep soundly by the unfamiliar was one of them.

He regretted taking this one into his bedroom.

The man had a 'graceful beauty' as had many of the others. He'd even been dressed in teal and fluttering a fan when Luo Binghe had approached him.

He'd also been awake for ten minutes and, thinking Luo Binghe asleep, had spent those last ten minutes gathering his own hair and sorting himself into an approximation of whatever he assumed Luo Binghe wanted to see upon waking.

The man stretched out with long, admittedly graceful limbs, and yawned with a small pleased noise, like a cat. There was a hand on Luo Binghe's chest and when he turned, as expected an expression of sated contentment was on the other man's face. That was probably true, given last night, but the affectation of forced pleasure at seeing Luo Binghe's eyes was… unbearably false.

“Good morning, my lord,” the man said, in a rumbling noise that he probably meant to sound like a purr. It was rather odd, since the man was human (as all but one had been—the half succubus was at least the best sex out of all of them, if nothing at all like Shen Qingqiu)—maybe he thought himself a cat or some other form of predator.

The man was prey and boring prey at that and Luo Binghe had long been tired of the hunt.

“Get out,” he said.

“My lord…?”

“Do not make me repeat myself,” Luo Binghe said, and turned, rising from his own bed. He really wished he hadn’t brought the man to his own bedroom, but it had been the convenience of time.

Another mewling protestation and Luo Binghe turned back to the bed and ripped the sheets off in one go, toppling the naked man to the floor. He glared at him, until the man finally took the hint and started gathering his clothes.

Luo Binghe finished ripping his sheets loose once the man finally left. He threw on an over-robe and grabbed a servant. “I want new bedding,” he said, and then left before getting the requisite nod.

At least he didn’t have to repeat himself.

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Liu Mingyan and Ning Yingying had accompanied him to court today. It helped as most of the petitioners were human and Luo Binghe’s patience was wearing thin. Demons took more kindly to throwing one of them across the room if he was in a bad mood. He rubbed his temple and nodded his appreciation when Yingying very sweetly took care of the last one who’s problem was beyond stupid and pointless.

“Husband,” Liu Mingyan said, her eyes a little too keen on him. She wasn’t shameless enough to ask him openly in court for details on his last few lovers, but the audience had departed and he was suspicious.

“Yes, Wife?” he said, enjoying the twitch on her eye. “Mingyan,” he gave her and could tell she smiled.

“I can take care of the Blue-Tipped Scorpions attacking that village.”

That meant she was bored and wanted to. Blue-Tipped Scorpions were some of the easier monsters to tackle and would’ve been a waste of his time so he nodded. She bowed shallowly and left. He wondered if she meant to bring their son with her. He probably should’ve asked. She mentioned something about Wuying’s martial skills improving the last time they spoke about him.

He hadn’t realized he was tapping his fingers against the chair of his throne, until Yingying’s hand fell on his. She regarded him carefully. “A-Luo?”

She didn't ask him specifically for a favor. It oozed out of her tone from the singular word, though.

"Which of my wives needs attention?" he asked, tiredly.

Ning Yingying's mouth pursed. "You do not sound very enthused."

He snorted. "Unless it's you, do I need to be?"

Her hand was still on his own. It felt nice to have her grip it briefly before she dropped it.

Luo Binghe had tried with a few of the men to encourage more tender touches, though he found most of them had no idea what to do with his hair. He wasn't sure if it was the texture or their inexperience, but it was irritating how lacking they all were. Even he had done his mother's hair as a child.

"Xiang Ru," she said, lightly. "Her family has not sent a letter in months and she's concerned. The travel is too long for her on her own."

And she was not a cultivator, so it would be dangerous even with the requisite guards assigned. He debated for a moment fobbing this off on Mobei-jun. His second never appreciated being used as a wife delivery service, but it was often amusing and if there were trouble at her home, he could take care of it.

"I'll see her for dinner," he said, instead.

Ning Yingying was still staring at him. "A-Luo, have you slept recently?"

A small, but genuine smile curled at his lips. He stood from his chair and kissed her cheek as she did as well. "No," he said. "Yingying is very sweet for asking."

"Dinner is not for a few hours," she said, still cautious in her examination of him. "Husband should get some rest beforehand."

He didn't grace that with a response other than inclining his head and she wisely took that as a hint to drop it.

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Xiang Ru was not a wife he often felt the need to approach, but he didn't find her company taxing. She insisted on serving his tea and held no affectation over her appreciation of his cooking. He rarely cooked twice for his wives that did.

He determined fairly quickly that she had good reason for concern. Her family was not from a high ranking branch, merely the overseers of her village, deep within the Shitou Mountains. He remembered her family, they had cried at her departure with the sincere grief of losing a favored daughter. She had held back her own tears, but her embraces of them were tight. He

was not surprised at all that they had kept better in touch than some of his more highly ranked wives.

Luo Binghe did feel a little frustrated that he could only remember the village held fields resplendent with spiritual energy and medicinal herbs, particularly lingzhi mushrooms, but not what troubles might be near the area. He couldn't recall why he'd gone there in the first place.

Her gratitude at his acknowledgement of her concern and then even more sincere gratitude at his pronouncement that he'd take her there himself was a nice distraction from the bitter fog that had clouded his last few months.

It was not as if Luo Binghe had not been aware of his disinterest in what had become of his life, but he hadn't realized how deeply apathetic he was with all of it until he'd been to that other world. Seen that other him. Felt that… sincere and kind affection from a man who he always thought had no capacity for it.

Maybe if he had slept recently he'd be angry about it, but he only felt overwhelmingly tired.

The relief and delight on Xiang Ru's family's faces when they arrived was… grating. For some reason he hated it.

He was a master at keeping any unwanted emotions hidden, so he smiled and gathered the details of why they had been unable to reach out for months. There had been trouble with trade and messages surrounding the village and the few that had gone out for more information had never come back.

Xiang Ru had no objection to staying with her family while Luo Binghe took care of the problem.

It was at least less boring than Blue-Tipped Scorpions.

Blighted Silver Panthers. It was an entire pack and took him the better part of two hours to finally subdue them all. He spent another hour taking the better looking hides from their carcasses and then lit fire to the bodies with the wave of a hand. The meat would do nothing but poison any opportunistic creatures.

Xiang Ru's family and village were grateful and Xiang Ru herself was enthusiastic when he bed her for the night. She slept sated and comfortable and Luo Binghe managed to sleep himself—even if his dreams were twisted with thoughts of what the *other* him was doing at the moment.

**[Quest Progress Made! ヽ(ᵔᗜᵔ)ノ]**

"Bing-ge?" Sha Yuan asked, faintly smiling at Luo Binghe's responding grin. He was completely unaware of the faces he made even now and it was a constant source of entertainment and fondness.

“Yes, A-Yuan?” Luo Binghe asked.

Shan Yuan had regrettably refused to sit in his lap while he went over his lesson plans, but he was close enough that the occasional lingering touch or kiss did not distract him. Luo Binghe took advantage of this and caught his hand.

Sha Yuan’s smile deepened and he turned his hand to interlace their fingers. “I have a question.”

Luo Binghe raised an eyebrow. “You only ever prompt beforehand when it’s an inappropriate one.”

His husband colored a little and looked away, clearing his throat. “Shouldn’t you appreciate the warning?”

“No, I like the surprise,” Luo Binghe said and laughed when Sha Yuan turned to glare at him. There was no heat behind it. “Ask.”

There was hesitation now, but Sha Yuan had never in their acquaintance let that stop him. “How did you decide which wives you’d have children with?”

“Does A-Yuan want children of his own?” Luo Binghe asked, raising his eyebrows. He was not against the idea, but he was selfish and wanted his husband’s singular attention for longer. It was also difficult to find sufficient enough time to spend with all six of his children without adding more.

His husband colored more deeply and tried to take his hand back, making a frustrated noise when Luo Binghe didn’t let him and only held it tighter.

“I have enough to deal with, with your immaturity as is,” Sha Yuan said, embarrassed and probably flushing all the way down to his chest. If Luo Binghe hadn’t really wanted to know what brought on the question, he would have started to undress him to check.

He lifted Sha Yuan’s hand and brushed his lips against it. “Why do you ask then?”

“Curiosity mostly,” Sha Yuan said. “I can’t see any common factors between them and I know you… uh… control if that happens or not.”

Luo Binghe resisted the urge to laugh at Sha Yuan’s discomfort in saying the obvious, but his amusement must have been plain because Sha Yuan glared at him again. “My blood and my seed can be controlled for those manners in a more highly specialized way than most cultivators, yes.”

He didn’t think he could get A-Yuan pregnant without an artifact or a herb, but he was willing to try… he wondered if ‘the science of it’ was enough to convince his ever curious husband.

“Absolutely not to whatever you’re thinking that made you make that face,” Sha Yuan said, scowling now and yanking hard enough to get his hand back. Luo Binghe let him and enjoyed the cranky frustrated posture as Sha Yuan crossed his arms over his chest.

Luo Binghe leaned back in his chair and affected an offended face. “Do you think your husband has ill intentions?”

“Yes,” Sha Yuan said, shortly and immediate.

He reached out for Sha Yuan’s hand again and got slapped away. Fuck, he loved him.

“I know more than six of them have asked,” Sha Yuan said, trying to redirect the conversation. He was very good at that and Luo Binghe tried not to take offense that it was a tactic he’d seen used on his own children.

“Many have asked,” Luo Binghe agreed. “Only six of them actually wanted a child of their own and not for some other motivation.”

The realities of his life made it difficult for him to be as present a parent as his mother had been to him, even with how busy she always was with her work. He refused to bring a child into the world without having at least one parent that would be that for them.

Sha Yuan’s lips had turned down. “What motivations?”

“More influence,” Luo Binghe said, “or their own vanity. Occasionally as a bid for my attention that wasn’t tied to either of those.” He’d merely seen to those wives more often until they were sated and rarely had them ask again. “Ling-er asked once when Mingyan was carrying, because she thought demon pregnancies were shorter and she could win for first child,” Luo Binghe said, chuckling a little. She hadn’t been too serious about it then and it was obvious how much she loved their Feiyue who came years later.

“So she settled for second place?” Sha Yuan asked, teasing. He knew his cousin’s temperament and Luo Binghe knew for a fact A-Fei was his favorite, even if he was equally indulgent with all of Luo Binghe’s children.

“I think she missed you, actually,” Luo Binghe said. Judging by the way Sha Yuan’s eyebrows shot up, he hadn’t expected that answer. “Dealing with inter-harem politics got boring and she had no one to coddle.”

“She has never once coddled me,” Sha Yuan said, testily.

“Mhmm,” Luo Binghe said, not in agreement. His husband narrowed his eyes at him and he laughed.

His annoyance turned to something more contemplative. “Do you want more children?” Sha Yuan asked.

The way he said it sounded too generalized, as if he thought one of the wives still in Luo Binghe’s harem would ask. As if Luo Binghe would even entertain the question now.

“Not at the moment,” Luo Binghe decided, rather than teasing more.

Whatever was going through his husband’s mind seemed to be settled by that answer. He turned back to his papers for his lesson plans and reached out with his hand, so that Luo

Binghe could hold it again.

Completely instinctual at this point. Luo Binghe had never had a partner that did not carefully considered each touch.

**[Protagonist Memories Loading… ～(ᵒʷᵒ)～]**

Jingyi was a very pretty child. Her mother, Lei Chin was objectively one of the most attractive of his harem. She was the only one he'd married that came close to approaching Mingyan's unveiled face.

Jingyi was very pretty, but her temperament was abysmal usually. He was surprised to find her dutifully practicing calligraphy during the entirety of his visit.

Lei Chin had manners and charm that made her an excellent host for visiting dignitaries that Luo Binghe didn't have the patience for—he knew she utilized those skills on himself but couldn't be bothered to be annoyed by it, since it was her general mannerism.

"Husband seems surprised, A-Jing is so studious," Lei Chin said, sweetly with the barest hint of amusement.

"Your husband is surprised she has not started stabbing the paper with the other end of the brush," he said, watching as Jingyi's very pretty face creased and twisted in concentration as she focused on the width of her lines.

"I finally gave in to First Wife's advice," Lei Chin admitted. "I wish I'd done it sooner."

"What advice?" Luo Binghe asked, still staring at Jingyi, who had blown a curl out of her face with the severe countenance of an adult and not a child of less than five.

"I spoke with the teacher that has been assisting the other children with their reading and additional studies," Lei Chin said. "Her behavior was from boredom. The moment her tutors started challenging her, she's been…" Lei Chin gestured to their child, smiling with the brightness that had first attracted him to her.

Then she shuttered her expression and slid her eyes to Luo Binghe. "Apologies, Husband. I know you don't like discussing these things."

Luo Binghe raised an eyebrow. "These things?"

"The… children's education," Lei Chin said, quietly.

"This husband is *always* comfortable discussing anything related to his children," Luo Binghe said, his tone sharp.

Lei Chin demurred, politely and expertly started to distract him with her elegance, manners, and change in subject.

The conversation still itched in his brain hours later.

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Luo Binghe was in a particularly sour mood. He'd put the other world out of his mind and gave up on the idea of going back there or finding something similar here. Sex with men had been as enjoyable as sex with women and if he was going to enjoy himself, it made more sense to utilize the wives he already had.

Last night he'd had a particularly unpleasant dream of his own memories before he'd been able to gather his wits and unravel it. His Shizun. The Shizun *here*. Not the other Shen Qingqiu who had cosseted and adored his students. The one who patted little whiny weak Luo Binghe on the head for any minuscule act he could consider an accomplishment. Luo Binghe had dragged himself through the stinging dirt and brutally pushed through to try and impress his Shizun and he more often felt the whip than that one a gentle pat on the head.

He was drowning in that sour mood when he heard one of his children cry out, "Shizun!"

So he stopped. This Shizun was a man and was affectionate as Jian flapped a wet painting towards him, the paint flicking against the teacher's face, seemingly unnoticed.

Shen Qingqiu had been affectionate too. To certain students.

The teacher was younger than some of the other instructors and a demon. He was a bit too familiar with how he ruffled Jian's hair.

Luo Binghe and Ning Yingying's son noticed his father and brightened, running immediately towards him. Caught out and not comfortable with the situation, Luo Binghe addressed Jian's barely coherent babbling and bent down to lift him up. He tossed him into the air, earning a delighted shriek and then held him at his side as he took in the 'Shizun' Jian had been speaking to.

The demon was muttering to himself and pretending not to notice his presence for some strange reason.

"Who's this?" Luo Binghe asked his son.

"Shizun!" said Jian with all the enthusiasm and lack of specificity his mother might have given him as an answer in their youth.

"Sha Yuan, Junshang," said the demon teacher, finally taking the consideration to bow to his emperor. "One of your children's teachers," he added unnecessarily.

"You're a demon."

He did not appear to be any sort of demon race that was inclined to children, so it was odd that this Sha Yuan was teaching them—especially one of his mostly human children.

"Yes," Sha Yuan said, from his pitiful attempt at a bow, going so far as to look up from it and curl his face in an attempt at confusion.

The urge to keep him down there longer was strong, but Jian was tapping his small hands against Luo Binghe's shoulders and he didn't want to excessively torment one of his teachers he seemed to like (before Luo Binghe was certain they deserved it at least). He exhaled through his nose and gestured for the demon to rise.

"What are you teaching them?"

"Would the Emperor like a copy of the lesson plans?" Sha Yuan asked, satisfyingly nervous at least. As he should have been from the start.

Jian pushed against Luo Binghe's shoulder and grinned. "Shizun teaches us calligraphy, books, art, running, and jumping!"

"Running and jumping?" Luo Binghe said, glancing at his son. Physical lessons made more sense from this instructor than four arts training. He wasn't even in formal robes, wearing a single layer that would've been scandalously immodest on a human, which could account for martial training. Jian wasn't too young for the basics—though that didn't explain his painting practice.

Jian nodded, smile widening. "He lets us chase him to uh…" Jian turned his head to entice his teacher's approval. "Capture monsters?"

Sha Yuan gave Jian his full attention. "Is that a request?" As Jian nodded, enthusiastically, the demon gave a very exaggerated sigh, as if this were a burden. "Make sure you pick a monster with less than seven legs this time."

It seemed familiar enough to be routine.

Jian wriggled in Luo Binghe's arms. "Do you want to capture monsters with us, Father?"

Luo Binghe swallowed down his annoyance and made sure his rejection was softened. "Some other time," he told Jian and set him down, telling him to go to his mother. A very obvious attempt at emotional manipulation occurred as Jian pouted and dragged his feet, but he was a well-behaved child and did what was told.

The demon tutor made to *turn his back* on Luo Binghe without being dismissed. That lack of protocol (lack of *fear*) made no sense and mysteries that Luo Binghe could not immediately solve were as good as threats. He grabbed the man's arm. Luo Binghe did not ignore threats, *especially* those around his children.

"The running and jumping aren't actually lessons," Sha Yuan said, awkwardly. "If that is what y—Junshang is concerned with."

"What are they then?" Luo Binghe asked, not releasing his grip as the demon finally turned to face him.

"Playing?" Sha Yuan said, squirming as if the light hold on his arm were uncomfortable. Pitiful. He hadn't even used claws.

Luo Binghe let him go, but there was still a twitch of irritation beneath his own skin. What kind of teacher included himself in recreation with the children? That did not seem normal. Jian's mother had dealt with abnormal affection from her own teacher. He would not let that repeat.

"Playing?"

"Yes," Sha Yuan said, his nervousness lessening but not his confusion. What game was *he* playing? "They're children."

Luo Binghe was about to come down on this potential threat when he realized the exact nature of the discordance he was feeling. Sha Yuan was familiar to him—the why should have occurred to Luo Binghe sooner as he shared the surname of Luo Binghe's third wife.

"You're Hualing's cousin." That explained the lack of formality or any sort of pageantry required for his posting—he was Sha Hualing's family after all. It didn't completely excuse it, but the threat level lessened.

Luo Binghe was slightly abashed, he did recall Sha Hualing mentioning that her cousin (who, in Luo Binghe's defense he had pictured much younger from her previous descriptions of *Yuan-er*) was teaching some of the children.

He had to concede that Lei Chin may have had a point. Luo Binghe trusted his wives to choose the right instructors for their children, but preferred to avoid influencing it himself unless there was an issue that required him.

"Yes," Sha Yuan said, barely veiling his own annoyance. "If you'd like to see the lesson plans I can gather them, but it may take me the afternoon."

Why would it take an entire afternoon? Didn't he use a standard?

"Why?"

"They're specialized to each of the students," Sha Yuan said. "I have to sort them."

There was something dismissive about Sha Yuan's countenance that crawled around beneath Luo Binghe's skin. The way he stood. The way he dismissed himself without permission. It was as if even the Emperor was beneath his notice.

It was the dismissiveness of a Shizun.

Luo Binghe decided he wanted to make the man squirm a bit. "Fine," he said. "Bring them this evening."

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Luo Binghe took his time looking through the written lessons plans for each of his children. All six, even Zhong, who should have been far too young for formalized instruction. The notations were interesting, but mostly he lingered on each page, because it made the man shift on his feet awkwardly and do a reprehensible attempt at standing respectfully.

Primarily, Sha Yuan seemed to be teaching the children the basics of literacy and some of the four arts, though there were notes that indicated he was also supplementing lessons in other areas. It seemed off. Luo Binghe had gone through the list of his children's instructors earlier and they had specialized tutors with significant experience and accreditations for those subjects.

Specifically baffling was Wuying's plan. There was no surprise that his eldest did not have much interest in the four arts—as he'd not inherited his mother's love of reading (which considering the filth she read, Luo Binghe was glad of). It seemed as if Sha Yuan was also assisting in his cultivation lessons.

"You're teaching Wuying cultivation, why?"

"It's supplementary," Sha Yuan said, pointing out the obvious. "His mother is handling the majority." Of course Liu Mingyan was. Luo Binghe knew that. "He also has a specialized tutor."

He knew that as well, but it didn't answer his question. "It doesn't specify spiritual or demonic."

"Wuying hasn't shown propensity for demonic cultivation," Sha Yuan said. "At least from what I've seen, I'm sure Junshang would be the expert in that regard."

Luo Binghe glared at the irritating false flattery. He was fully aware Wuying had less potential and interest in demonic cultivation. Liu Mingyan and he had discussed it in depth since their son was approaching core formation and Luo Binghe knew from experience that balancing mixed blood could be detrimental if not approached correctly.

Given his own training, it was a miracle Luo Binghe had survived long enough for his Shizun to attempt to kill him.

"So you're teaching him supplemental *spiritual* cultivation?"

There was a flare of something behind Sha Yuan's otherwise respectful stare. "As it relates to his other lessons. Yes."

"You're a demon." Spiritual cultivation from a demon did not seem well balanced.

"Yes, we've established," Sha Yuan said, shortly, clearly taking it as an insult.

"How are you teaching something you can't do?"

"Isn't that the expression?" Sha Yuan said, before shaking his head. His entire countenance shifted and he spoke emphatically, gesturing with his hands. "I read. A lot. I understand the concept well enough to apply it to what Wuying is doing. I can see how that might be a concern if it was the *only* training he was receiving, but it's rather insignificant compared to how much he's been learning from his mother."

Sha Yuan belatedly seemed to remember to also add, "And his specialized instruction."

Interesting. “You don’t like his instructor,” Luo Binghe said.

“He’s qualified,” Sha Yuan said, as good as an agreement. “It’s not this one’s place to pass judgement on the other tutors.”

Luo Binghe was an expert at keeping his thoughts off his face, but that was amusing enough he almost gave in to the urge to snort. He leaned back in his seat and idly flipped his thumb against the pages he was still holding, since his handling of them seemed to annoy the man.

“You *really* don’t like him.”

Sha Yuan proved himself as unable to mask his feelings as his cousin (not that Sha Hualing often attempted it).

“The man’s an idiot,” Sha Yuan said, a scowl forming on his face. “Wuying is intelligent, but he isn’t motivated by meditating for meditation’s sake. He doesn’t *explain* the reasons Wuying needs to learn anything so why would Wuying actually care to learn it?”

The man threw his arms up into the air in his frustration. “Not to mention, he won’t show A-Fei any basic cultivation techniques because she’s more demon than her siblings. It might also be because she’s a girl. He seems to ignore Xiu-er, which is irresponsible, because her mother doesn’t know how to cultivate so she’s not receiving any specialized instruction. Who cares if she’s a girl? Your first and second wives are *outstanding* cultivators. That should be proof enough to pull his head out of his—”

Sha Yuan seemed to finally catch himself, which was a shame. He cleared his throat and bowed. “A… apologies. This one shouldn’t speak ill of his fellow instructors.”

When Luo Binghe had been young, hopeful, and innocent — he’d had that crushed into dirt at Cang Qiong Mountain. *Shizun* had been the orchestrator of the most severe abuses, even ones carried out on his behalf rather than his own hand, but the rest of the Sect was complicit. Even if some of the other Peak Lords may not have been aware of the extent of abuse, the Sect Leader certainly had to be. He’d come with an excuse to visit Qing Jing Peak and Shen Qingqiu many times over the years.

As a young adult, tortured in the Endless Abyss and distracting himself by counting which offenses deserved his retribution, Luo Binghe knew too well that his own paltry excuses for his bruises and untreated wounds had been paper thin. The Sect leader took an active role in looking away. There was no satisfaction at his death, beyond how it finally hurt Shen Qingqiu when nothing else seemed to, but there was no regret either.

Sha Yuan openly sharing his dislike of another instructor, even with his nerves clearly attempting to play at supplication—Luo Binghe respected that far more than covering for them.

He didn’t immediately route out the instructor, rather talked to his children, their mothers, and observed the man for himself. It was immediately obvious that Sha Yuan had correctly identified the problem.

The fact that his regard for Luo Binghe's children was higher than his concern for offending the Emperor himself was a mark in his favor.

**[Quest Progress Made! (ᵔᴗᵔ)]**

His husband was far more clever than most gave him credit for. There were few people that could trick Luo Binghe, and even less that could do it for long.

"How long have you been correcting *my* form?" Luo Binghe asked, once his practice with Wuying had ended.

Sha Yuan flustered and shook his head. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Mm," Luo Binghe said and wrapped an arm around Sha Yuan's waist, drawing him flush against him. "Try again."

Sha Yuan looked up at him, wriggling a little to get out of his grip but not enough to truly desire it. "You fight very well," he said, in what he thought was a placating tone.

Luo Binghe lifted his husband off his feet, enjoying the squawk of objection and the way he slapped at his arms. "How long?"

Sha Yuan sighed and dropped his head in defeat, still slightly dangling above the floor. "When you asked about the sword forms."

Luo Binghe scoffed, annoyed that he was surprised. He had taken too long to realize that every careful adjustment Sha Yuan made on behalf of better showing them to Wuying was actually him adjusting Luo Binghe's misunderstanding of the form itself.

"You learn really quickly!" Sha Yuan said turning around and looking up at him imploringly, once Luo Binghe released him to his feet.

It was a strange feeling. The attempt at being placated, not because he was worried about the consequences, but because he was worried he might hurt Luo Binghe's *feelings*.

"You've been adjusting things I already learned," Luo Binghe pointed out.

His husband's mouth twisted into something past a frown. "You got shorted when you were first taught and had to adapt. Your meridian pathways are fucked up, by the way. You should try cycling them more often with Mingyan or Yingying."

Luo Binghe shrugged. "It hasn't caused concern."

Sha Yuan sighed. "Binghe, just because you're powerful enough to not need to do it correctly doesn't mean you shouldn't. What if you have to fight something…" He gestured from head to toe at Luo Binghe. "Equal."

Luo Binghe thought of the other him. He was not nearly as powerful, but he did have some advantages—being able to keep up let alone injure Luo Binghe in the first place was clear on that. He would not have won the fight if *his* Shizun hadn't joined, but given enough time to develop on that power he might be an actual threat, as much as Luo Binghe hated giving the idea consideration.

"Is A-Yuan worried about me?" Luo Binghe asked, making his tone sweet.

His husband narrowed his eyes at him. "Yes. Fucked up meridians could cause a qi deviation among other problems. And it's…" The glare softened into actual concern. "You shouldn't always have to push through pain when you meet something challenging."

This was so strange too. That every day he found some new way to be even fonder of Sha Yuan than he had been the day before. Everything about his other wives had been a slow degrading of interest.

He cupped Sha Yuan's cheek and brushed his thumb against his jaw, tilting his head up to meet his eyes better. "If you make me a lesson plan, you can't get angry when I call you Shizun."

The adoring softness on Sha Yuan's face immediately curdled and he kicked Luo Binghe in the shin hard enough to bruise. He wore shoes in the palace thankfully since his toenails were very sharp, so it was mostly a dull pain. Sha Yuan looked even more irritated when Luo Binghe started laughing at him.

**[Protagonist Memories Loading… (°ʖ°)]**

Luo Binghe considered Sha Yuan as he strolled from market booth to market booth, unaware of being observed. He still wasn't sure what he thought of one of children's teachers traipsing from one part of the realm to another to capture knowledge on beasts and plants. Part of him wanted to open a portal and shove Sha Yuan through so he didn't get himself into more trouble.

The longer Luo Binghe observed him, the more differences he noticed from Sha Yuan and Sha Hualing. The ease of self and sincerity was there, but Sha Yuan's sincerity was cheerfully greeting each merchant and asking them about their wares. He kindly greeted both human and demon without a thought to the difference. He had been awkward when Luo Binghe had rescued him and absolutely rude after, but there was a grace to him that was easier to see now that Luo Binghe was looking for it.

Luo Binghe considered the idea of fucking him and for the first time in a while didn't find his own disinterest. At the very least the man would have honest reactions given how *bad* he was at not saying exactly what he was thinking.

He'd also seen Sha Yuan without his shirt, dripping wet as he washed the blood off of himself. It was not a bad view. Neither was the way his eyes lit up in delight when they watched the Magma Breath Tortoises settle into their new home.

Not that Luo Binghe was particularly worried, but Sha Yuan seemed interested based on the way he watched Luo Binghe eat as they walked towards the inn. It wasn't like Sha Hualing would be bothered.

There was a sticking point however.

"And you… like my children," Luo Binghe said, after Sha Yuan admitted how he had been manipulated into teaching them. He seemed fond enough of them and his children did seem fond of Sha Yuan as well, but…

"I love your children," Sha Yuan said, easily, not even stopping to see how Luo Binghe took that statement. It was a breath of air out of his mouth, like how he'd commented on the amount of teeth in a Magma Breath Tortoise's mouth. It was merely a fact that Sha Yuan knew.

Luo Binghe realized he'd paused and struggled with ease at what to say. "I'm not used to teachers like that."

Even the kindness and affection he had been shown from less abusive teachers had been conditional. He still remembered the way the Old Palace Master looked at him.

Sha Yuan looked at him now like he was disappointed. "You should have been," he said, like it was a fact too.

A teacher for his children like this was precious. Luo Binghe immediately tossed the idea of sleeping with him aside.

He was even more satisfied by that decision as he watched the undiluted wonder on Sha Yuan's face looking at *moss* and *bugs*. There were too many years Luo Binghe had spent wondering if merging the realms had been the right decision. Managing the tenuous new relationship between demon and humans was a constant struggle and he was sometimes not sure it would ever improve. Seeing someone appreciate the intricacies of that was… novel.

Perhaps Sha Yuan as a person was precious too.

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"Feifei," Sha Hualing chided. "That's seven. Your father's mouth has to be dry by now."

It was, but Luo Binghe was not going to ignore a request for an eighth story if Feiyue's mother couldn't talk her out of it.

"One more?" Feiyue asked, her small fingers tugging on Luo Binghe's sleeve and her eyes wide and adoring.

Sha Hualing scoffed as Luo Binghe gave in to their daughter's obvious manipulations and had her choose another book. She fell asleep during the ninth story.

"Emperor of the Three Realms, brought down by a child," Sha Hualing said, wryly as they shut the door to Feiyue's bedroom.

“Our child,” Luo Binghe pointed out.

Sha Hualing preened, as she always did when any positive towards Feiyue was mentioned. As much as she pretended otherwise, she also spoiled her. “Feifei does have significant advantages in being charming,” she agreed.

“She’ll be intolerable tomorrow when you’re not here to read her more,” Sha Hualing added, scowling before turning around and shaking her head. “Aiyah. Why is my useless cousin still on his stupid flower trip?”

“Are you implying your cousin is a reasonable replacement for my absence?”

Sha Hualing was absolutely shameless in her grin she shot over her shoulder. “Yuan-er does different voices for every character.”

“Then I’ll let *Yuan-er* handle her bedtime from now on,” he said gruffly. He didn’t know why it bothered him. Maybe because Sha Yuan’s advice about spending more time with his own children had been right and Luo Binghe didn’t like that he’d had to be given it.

Sha Hualing turned towards him and slapped his arm, hard for a human, but softly for her. “She has not shut up *all week* about how you were coming tonight to tuck her in.”

“I can come tomorrow night as well,” Luo Binghe said. He didn’t have anything requiring his immediate attention that he couldn’t delegate tomorrow and he’d planned on seeing Zhong earlier in the day. He was too young to be in want of a particular activity but Jia Fu had given him their son’s ‘nap schedule’ so he planned on entertaining the boy somehow.

Sha Hualing was giving him too discerning a look. It was the hunter looking for weakness as it approached its prey. “Yuan-er got to you.”

Luo Binghe frowned at her. “What are you talking about?”

Sha Hualing put her hands on her hips. “Do *not* seduce my cousin if you’re still only trying on the idea of dicks.”

“*Hualing*,” Luo Binghe said, sharply enough that she cowed.

She still looked annoyed with him though she badly hid it in a pathetic huff. “You clearly like him.”

“I can like someone and not fuck them, Hualing,” Luo Binghe said, still irritated. If this had been before Feiyue, he might have reacted more aggressively at her impudence. Then again she probably would have enjoyed that.

Sha Hualing tilted her head to regard him and then pursed her lips. “Yuan-er isn’t like me. He’s soft and you’ll break him.”

“He doesn’t seem to be vying for my favor and I have no interest in going after him,” Luo Binghe said, trying not to show his amusement at her concern. He was still irritated with her. It was the downside of having a wife who always spoke so openly.

She narrowed her eyes at him and then shrugged, seemingly placated. He did admire she'd defend her family at least. He could always trust her to protect their daughter.

"Surprised you didn't fuck him, honestly," Sha Hualing said, reaching for some clutter Feiyue had left on one of the tables earlier. "Auntie used to make me do sweeps around the grounds for the slobbering morons who thought he was interested."

"Are you implying you're surprised I'm not a slobbering moron?" Luo Binghe asked, crossing his arms.

Sha Hualing looked over her shoulder, fluttering her eyelashes. "Of course not, Husband."

**[Quest Progress Made! ヽ(。＞ᴗ＜)ノ♡]**

"Ah, he's doing so well!" Sha Yuan said, in an excited whisper.

Wuying turned from where he had been countering an attack from the Speckled Fire Wolf to glare at him.

"Pay attention!" Sha Yuan said, but even in the dark Luo Binghe could tell he was embarrassed at getting caught. He waited until Wuying had turned his attention back to the beast and then covered his face with his hands. "I forgot his cultivation hearing had gotten so good."

Luo Binghe gave him a pat on the back and mostly didn't laugh, because he was focused on watching his son face off with the creature. It was an intriguing sight now that he'd had a more solid hand in Wuying's training. Bits of influence from Luo Binghe, Liu Mingyan, and Sha Yuan were all folded into the unique dance of Wuying's form.

Finally, his son came over dragging the dead wolf by its ankle and threw it in front of Luo Binghe with a consternated frown on his face. "I didn't need a chaperone."

"You're thirteen," Sha Yuan scolded.

Luo Binghe remembered thirteen. He did not remember having adults who cared enough to make sure he didn't get eaten or poisoned badly during a Night Hunt he would've been severely unqualified for. As it was, he was fairly certain Wuying could have managed on his own, but he wouldn't tell him that.

"You did well, Wuying," Luo Binghe said, settling a hand on his eldest's shoulder.

Wuying momentarily blustered but quickly composed his face and then bowed, "Thank you, Father."

Sha Yuan sighed. "Wouldn't want to ruin the moment with a hug or anything, right?"

"*Shizun*," Wuying said, exasperatedly.

Luo Binghe couldn't help his laugh. He patted his son on the shoulder again and stopped Sha Yuan from trying to help him carry the wolf corpse as they made their way back to the palace. Wuying proudly displayed his kill to every guard they passed and then his mother who praised him and then told him to take it somewhere else to skin.

“Did you ever meet Liu Qingge?” Sha Yuan asked him later.

“Not directly,” Luo Binghe said, “why?”

Sha Yuan shrugged, frowning at the floor, lost in thought about something. “Mingyan says Wuying reminds her of him.”

“I can see that,” Luo Binghe said. He was glad for her that was the case. Their relationship had mostly begun because of her brother’s death and finding solace in digging out justice for it. He knew now that vengeance would eventually only be fumes to live on.

“I can’t believe he’s thirteen already,” Sha Yuan said, breathing out. “At this rate he’s going to be taller than me in a few years.”

“Probably,” Luo Binghe agreed and then smiled when Sha Yuan glared at him. “Between me and his mother, he has a fairly good chance of being taller than me as well.”

That seemed to mollify Sha Yuan slightly. Luo Binghe did not resist the urge to bully him up against a wall and lean over him, to remind him of their height difference.

“You’re very lucky you’re handsome,” Sha Yuan said, tartly.

“Mhmm,” Luo Binghe agreed and leaned down to kiss him.

**[Protagonist Memories Loading ✧。٩(ˊᗜˋ)و✧*。]**

In the middle of their second Night Hunt (or as Sha Yuan baffling referred to it as ‘boys night out’), they stopped mid hunt because Sha Yuan saw some kind of plant. He had startled, excitedly shouted and then went to collect it.

Luo Binghe stood back and watched him hover over the plant, carefully examining each petal before he plucked it and put it in some kind of wooden container he’d taken out of his qiankun pouch.

“Is he always like this?” Luo Binghe asked, glancing up at Mobei-jun.

“Usually,” his second in command responded, looking placidly bored.

After another ten minutes, Sha Yuan had collected whatever he needed, and was dusting dirt and pollen off his robes. He grinned as he came over. “Opalescent Wild Weed. I had no idea it grew this far south.”

They were both staring at him, Mobei-jun blankly and Luo Binghe with unveiled annoyance.

Sha Yuan sighed. “It’s an ingredient for a counteragent that works against at least fifteen different aphrodisiac poisons.”

Luo Binghe rarely heard them referred to as poisons, but he supposed that wasn’t inaccurate.

“Useful,” Mobei-jun said, making Sha Yuan smile in a way he probably thought was smug.

It looked more like Jian or Yingying when they were absurdly cheerful. Too bright to look at directly.

“Ah,” Luo Binghe said, realizing. “This makes more sense. *You’re* why Sha Hualing had antidotes to several maladies that befell some of the harem.”

He’d thought her having cures that prevented the need for him to fuck one of his wives or future wives was a little out of character.

“Yeah probably,” Sha Yuan said with a snort. “She used to ask about weird stuff, but honestly you should probably just always carry the antidote based on how much it seems to crop up.”

“I don’t usually have any trouble taking care of it,” Luo Binghe said, dismissively.

“Yeah, but you wouldn’t *have* to,” Sha Yuan said, like that meant something. At Luo Binghe’s continued frowning he sighed and shook his head. “What if no one was around. Or only someone you weren’t attracted to?”

That had never been the case, but if so, “Xin Mo,” Luo Binghe said, patting his sword.

Sha Yuan looked pained for some reason. “Right.”

“Is it effective against Radiant Snowdrops?” Mobei-jun asked, thoughtfully.

Luo Binghe couldn’t remember if those had given him ice burn or if fucking in the snow had, but he had no desire the repeat the experience.

“I think so, but I haven’t tested it,” Sha Yuan said. “I can check if you have samples.”

Luo Binghe felt his brow crease in confusion. “You’re going to infect yourself to see if it works?”

“What?” Sha Yuan looked horrified. “Of course not! I’m going to see if it neutralizes the pollen that causes it—the stuff usually glows or has a reaction when its active so it’s pretty easy to see if it doesn’t. I can show you if you want.”

From anyone else that would’ve been a come-on.

It wasn’t hard to picture there being an accident in whatever little experimental alchemist station Sha Yuan had set up. It was a situation Luo Binghe had been in enough times that it was actually quite easy to picture what Sha Yuan would look like, how his pupils would dilate, his clawed hands clenching, he had a fine neck too it would likely—

“Shall we continue the hunt or are there more flowers you’d like to pluck?” Luo Binghe asked, forcing himself back to the present.

“You don’t have to phrase it like that,” Sha Yuan muttered, unclipping his butterfly swords from his back and striding forward.

Luo Binghe did not observe Sha Yuan walking too carefully.

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Shao Yang and Huang Shun were both impeccably dressed with usually perfect manners. They both came from prominent families in Gyersan and Tangging, two cities split by a fertile area that tended some of the best crops in the eastern regions. They were supposed to *share* the area once Luo Binghe married the two more prominent daughters.

They were both working his last nerve with their arguing.

The only reason he hadn’t thrown something yet was because Sha Yuan was patiently waiting in the back of the room, reading a book that was probably for Mingyan’s book club. This time had been carved out to plan Sha Yuan’s next ‘expedition’ but Shao Yang and Huang Shun had both demanded attention. Forcing them to be witnesses to their bickering.

“Husband! You need to tell her—”

“He needs to tell me nothing! You need to—”

“Do you see the way this petty little—”

“Watch your tongue, you—”

They went at it like that for long enough that Luo Binghe seriously considered cutting two portals with Xin Mo and shoving them back into their rooms.

Then Sha Yuan, without looking up from his book said, “Shouldn’t you be leaving at least one of the fields fallow and rotating them seasonally anyway?”

Shao Yang and Huang Shun both immediately stopped screaming at each other and turned towards Sha Yuan. They apparently had not noticed he was there, which under the circumstances Luo Binghe found particularly funny.

Sha Yuan looked up from his book as he felt their eyes on him. “That’s a basic farming concept.”

“Draw up the fields in thirds,” Luo Binghe agreed, eager for a chance at ending his headache. “You should go visit your families to see that the best case is made for each of you.”

A *long* visit would be preferable.

Shao Yang and Huang Shun eyed each other uneasily, but a small truce was made as they considered this and also as they likely considered what to make of Sha Yuan and how to

handle him as a threat for their husband's affections.

It was tempting to tell them that Sha Yuan was no threat, because he'd never had much affection for either of them in the first place. There was no point in fanning the flames of his already temperamental harem, especially when the aggression coming out of it wouldn't be to Luo Binghe's benefit.

Sha Yuan waited until they left and closed his book, holding it up. "Ironically, this week it's a harem drama."

Luo Binghe chuckled and leaned back in his chair. "How does the book sort these problems out?"

Sha Yuan stared down at the book and his lip curled in annoyance. "They usually poison each other and then have sex."

This time Luo Binghe laughed and Sha Yuan's responding smile was small and genuine.

**[Quest Progress Made! Keep trying hard! ヽ(。＞ᴗ＜)ノ♡]**

There were multiple reasons that Luo Binghe ensured Sha Yuan's closet was stocked with fine fabrics in blacks and red that matched his own. Sha Yuan had at first protested the robes. Then Luo Binghe had littered his arms and neck with bites he'd begged for at the time and then cursed him for afterwards.

His husband's face was too thin to stand them showing, but Luo Binghe knew that covering them or not, his intent was clear.

"You should come to court with me today," Luo Binghe said, kissing Sha Yuan's neck as he helped him tie his robes (after having untied them earlier).

"I thought I was banned from court after the last time," Sha Yuan said, wryly.

"Mostly demon petitioners today," Luo Binghe said. Far harder for Sha Yuan's acerbic tongue to offend. "You can even sit in my lap."

Sha Yuan reached back and smacked Luo Binghe's chest with the back of his hand. "I'd wrinkle the fancy clothes I *have* to wear because someone can't keep their fangs to themselves."

Luo Binghe scraped his teeth against the exposed bit of Sha Yuan's neck and felt the shudder against him, encouraging it before he sank his teeth in. He didn't get far along with the bite before Sha Yuan was squirming away from him and swatting uselessly at his chest. "You're fucking feral, you know that."

He was. And he liked the idea of Sha Yuan perched on his lap all day for many reasons, but would settle for him nearby draped in fabrics that exuded his position and showed who claimed him.

The humans who showed interest (that Sha Yuan never seemed to notice) were easy to scare off. An eye wandering once in Luo Binghe's view would never wander again, unless they wanted it removed. Demons were too entrenched in the idea that they'd need to fight for their interests, so he'd had to come up with other ways to dissuade them for their own good.

Sha Yuan was too soft for a demon and would have likely objected to that much carnage on his own behalf.

**[Protagonist Memories Loading… (╥﹏╥)]**

Sha Yuan was holding up a furred cloak with a critical eye. He was on a tangent about how there was inconsistency in which demon races and human cultivators were capable of regulating their temperatures with qi and curiosity as to whether or not Mobei-jun's clan made an instinctual effort or if it was related to some genetic predisposition.

It wasn't an uninteresting topic, but Luo Binghe was more distracted by how absolutely clueless Sha Yuan seemed to be about the attention he was getting from the attendants in the shop. There was no need for the tailor to measure his legs for a cloak, or linger touches too long while comparing fabrics. Not to mention the obvious flirtatious turns of phrase that Sha Yuan merely smiled at—encouraging it out of unknowing politeness.

"You're sure we shouldn't be trying to blend into the environment?" Sha Yuan asked, drawing Luo Binghe's attention away from where he was glaring at the attendant that had offered them tea for the fifteenth time.

"The risk of getting lost in the snow is greater than the risk of being too visible and seen by an enemy," Luo Binghe said, crossing his arms over his chest.

"It'd be harder to sneak up on one too," Sha Yuan pointed out. He hummed thoughtfully, lost in thought and muttered something about 'yeti' whatever that was.

There were few beasts up north that would hold much interest, but anything discovered would likely have adapted enough to sneak up on them with or without visual camouflage.

"Based on experience," Luo Binghe said, "I'd prefer to take the challenge of an attack than a blizzard."

"You were caught in a blizzard?" Sha Yuan asked, not noticing the disappointed frown of the clerk as he turned his attention away from them.

Luo Binghe could not help the way his lips twitched up. Sha Yuan was always easy to draw the attention of if he was wiling to share one of his exploits. The details he was interested in weren't usually what others Luo Binghe had shared the stories with cared about—in fact Sha Yuan's eyes seemed to glaze over in disinterest whenever the subject of meeting one of his wives came into play.

At first Luo Binghe thought he might be jealous, but based on his complete lack of any sort of acknowledgment of the interest garnered around him… Luo Binghe was fairly certain Sha Yuan might have been actually blind to the topic in general.

It was for the best he didn't dress like his cousin. Luo Binghe wasn't sure the empire could take it. Sha Hualing never accompanied her cutting remarks with soft, kind smiles and ease of listening. Every vendor they approached in the capital city seemed keen for Sha Yuan's attention in a way that didn't seem as cloying as when they bid for Luo Binghe's own.

And Sha Yuan was patient with almost everyone—though a few occasions he had been delightfully cutting and acerbic, most of which had seemed to be at Luo Binghe's own defense.

It was…

Well, Luo Binghe understood why Sha Yuan was drawing the attention, but it was starting to become an annoying itch every time he noticed and Sha Yuan *didn't*. At least if it had been a forced bout of ignorance, Luo Binghe could have written it off as an act.

Several times Luo Binghe was tempted to ask Sha Yuan *why* he lived on his own with all the interest surrounding him, but decided it might be worse if Sha Yuan started to notice it. Luo Binghe was greedy and wanted to soak up as much of his new friend's time for his own means. It had only been a year of knowing Sha Yuan and Luo Binghe already very much did not want to share him.

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Luo Binghe found himself once again staring at the canopy of his own bed, listless and lacking sleep. This time no one was near him.

It had been his own fault, really. He'd let himself get to a state he had never been in his entire life. He wasn't happy or optimistic in his naive ignorance. He was *content*. The days had become easier to pass. He ironically hadn't even thought about the nice Shizun or the other him for months until the morning before he and Sha Yuan descended the mountain. Even then, the thought was momentary and focused more on the realization that he had been able to forget.

It would have been easier to accept how false it was, Sha Yuan in his life, if he'd realized sooner. If he hadn't let the man get so deep under his skin that he looked forward to every visit. It was so easy to see once he realized it. Once he'd been forcefully cared for with true concern without any other thought. Sha Yuan had no court manners or the relevant training to be as sophisticated as either Shizun, but he was graceful. He was beautiful. He was kind in his own right.

Luo Binghe had wanted this so badly that he'd even considered going back and stealing it from that other world before realizing what a waste that would be.

He was used to illusions. He'd crafted many of them to survive the blistering cold or heat (and sometimes both) of the Endless Abyss. He'd wrapped himself in dreams of a better, kinder world. Where people like the kind Shen Qingqiu and Sha Yuan existed and loved him.

But they were illusions. At some point he'd woken up every time and been faced with the reality that painfully chapped the skin from his bones until it grew itself back.

Luo Binghe was lost in his thoughts when there was a loud banging on his door. He was tempted to ignore it, but knew he could always take out his frustration on whoever was asking for some idiotic task he was certain someone else could handle.

Then everything narrowed down to a pitch point and later Luo Binghe remembered very little beyond the flashes of panic and indignation at the universe giving him this and then trying to *take it away* again.

He hadn't had a qi deviation in years. Xin Mo had no control over him and he had control over himself. Seeing Sha Hualing's fucking father with a jagged knife to Sha Yuan's throat sent him spiraling in an instant.

Once Sha Yuan was safe with a healer and Luo Binghe had returned to his rooms, he had a momentary thought that if Sha Hualing had not talked him down, he would have been the reason Sha Yuan was dead.

Then he had another momentary thought that everything would have been so much easier that way.

And for the first time in a very long time. Luo Binghe truly understood how much he hated himself.

**[Quest Complete! Quest Complete! Quest Complete! ✧。٩(ˊᗜˋ)و✧*。]**

For as often as Sha Yuan objected to Luo Binghe's amorous attentions, he never actually rejected them. For a demon, Luo Binghe's husband had a very thin face.

"You—" Sha Yuan had seen Luo Binghe naked enough times at this point, yet undressing to dip into the Cerulean Rejuvenation Cove Pools, had him blushing enough to even be seen amidst the reflective gemstone that cast small illumination against the crystalline waters.

"Me?" Luo Binghe asked, ensuring the water only barely covered him up to his waist. If he were hard already his pillar probably would've been peeking out.

Sha Yuan glanced down past what the water covered and his tongue briefly touched his lower lip. Then he folded his arms in front of himself and twisted his mouth. "I don't want to get cursed because we ruined the purification of some ancient heavenly water source."

"That is why I removed my clothes," Luo Binghe said, innocently. He grinned. "Shouldn't A-Yuan remove his before he joins me?"

"*Luo Binghe*," Sha Yuan scolded. "What do you need to rejuvenate anyway?"

Luo Binghe chuckled and moved out of the water again, enjoying watching the way his husband's eyes dipped to the reveal of new skin before he caught himself and looked up again. The glare was absolutely toothless with how flushed he was.

"The heavenly healing magic dissipated when I cured Bai Yijun of Tempestuous Cursed Aeonium poisoning."

"Ah right, wife #112," Sha Yuan said, mostly to himself. "So it's just a pretty pool now?"

Luo Binghe refrained from commenting on the fact that Sha Yuan could easily draw up which order he'd married which wife in and the fact that he had dragged Luo Binghe to several 'pretty pools' on the pretense of gathering information about some rare animal or plant.

He strode towards Sha Yuan and started undressing him himself. Sha Yuan tried smacking his hands away and muttering that he'd do it, but he was taking far too long so Luo Binghe kept assisting until his skin was finally exposed.

"Don't," Sha Yuan said, jabbing his index finger into Luo Binghe's chest. "You have pick me up like a maiden face. I can walk."

"I have a specific face for that?" Luo Binghe asked, laughing.

Sha Yuan threw his hand in some sort of gesture that Luo Binghe didn't understand but assumed was vulgar before slowly inching into the pool. He was careful with it, but soon realized the water's temperature was always pleasant. That was the main source of magic still left in the place so it made a nice spot to indulge.

They swam for a little bit—the water did go deep enough towards the center of the pool and Sha Yuan was enraptured by the different reflections and how they changed when he passed his hand through them.

Luo Binghe marveled at the idea he could ever want anything or anyone else.

He swam towards Sha Yuan and wrestled him into a hold, pushing them both back to more secure footing. His husband laughed and Luo Binghe drew his mouth towards him to taste it. Sha Yuan was in an easy and lax mood and it made him malleable to being kissed senseless with less fussing.

Luo Binghe dragged his fingers down his husband's frame until he could palm and squeeze his ass beneath the water. Sha Yuan responded by tightening his legs around Luo Binghe's waist.

"This is still only water not oil," Sha Yuan said, the way his breath hitched creating a more petulant tone than a chiding one.

"I had an idea around that," Luo Binghe said, pulling Sha Yuan forward enough that he could scrape his teeth against the vulnerable skin at the base of his neck.

Sha Yuan squirmed against his grip, which only drew the claws of Luo Binghe's fingers more firming into the fleshy part of his ass. “You’re *sure* the heavenly magic dissipated?”

“A union of souls beneath the water would not taint it, even if it weren’t,” Luo Binghe said, staring up at him.

Sha Yuan scoffed, but it was tinged with amusement. “What about the three-quarters demon yang energy we’d be adding?”

“I’m offended you think I’m only going to make you come once,” Luo Binghe said, biting at Sha Yuan’s collar bone hard enough to mark.

“Shameless and feral,” Sha Yuan hissed, smacking his back, but then his fingers curled and dug into Luo Binghe’s shoulder and he couldn't help angle himself for easier access for Luo Binghe to continue to mark up.

Luo Binghe gave into the urge to squeeze Sha Yuan’s cheek with his claws one more time, if only for the squeak it elicited, before he retracted his claws and moved them downwards. He didn’t insert any, but rather used his finger to lightly swirl around the outer circle of Sha Yuan’s hole and direct his blood parasites to start easing the inside open—ensuring the arousal base of Sha Yuan was teased but not enough to climax.

“Ah fuck—what the—” Sha Yuan gripped Luo Binghe’s shoulder so tightly he might have broken skin if he hadn’t been so diligent with filling his own claws. “What—did you *sneak* me blood parasites?” Sha Yuan asked, clearly trying to sound indignant but failing with the gasping moans that accompanied the end of the sentence.

“I didn’t have to,” Luo Binghe said, smiling as Sha Yuan buried his head into his shoulder and swore as the blood parasites continued to massage him further open. Luo Binghe tipped his head just slightly so he could bring his lips close to the base of Sha Yuan’s ear. “You’ve broken skin more than once, which is always impressive given you don’t have fangs.”

He *could* have given Sha Yuan the customary blood during their wedding—and was certain Sha Yuan assumed it was some grand gesture of trust that he hadn't, but honestly Luo Binghe had been more focused on getting his husband to go through with the wedding quickly so he couldn’t rationalize his way out again, that he’d forgotten.

It was only a few days ago he realized *how* often Sha Yuan bit through his skin during their more intimate moments and had this idea.

He’d done something similar more than a few times with wives that were less comfortable taking his size or not as experienced, but he hadn’t given any of the men he’d slept with his blood.

“I need to watch my teeth if its—*ahhh* fuck—enough for this,” Sha Yuan said, trying to smother his pitched whine into Luo Binghe’s shoulder.

“Mm, this husband disagrees,” Luo Binghe said and continued to use his blood parasites to flex the inner walls of Sha Yuan open as if he were leisurely fingering him himself. He

almost let him come, but decided he wanted Sha Yuan to do that on his cock. It was a feeling that never seemed to get old.

With a few more errant kisses, Luo Binghe adjusted their position (and ignored Sha Yuan's half-hearted bitching about manhandling) so that Sha Yuan was resting his torso against the lip of the pool and the full expanse of his back was presented to Luo Binghe. The reflection of the crystalline waters warped the perfectly symmetrical roundness of Sha Yuan's ass, but he enjoyed the view either way as he pushed inside.

Luo Binghe wished he'd thought of trying this sooner. It would have improved the many times they'd visited the bathing pools. He slid into Sha Yuan as if he'd already been worked through a few times and pressed his lips against bumps in Sha Yuan's spine, as he thrust into him.

It had been a while since Luo Binghe had stretched the limits of their demonic stamina and his blood parasites made it even easier to extend. So much so he took Sha Yuan several times in the course of a few hours—in any other water source their skin would have been wrinkled and pruned by now.

"We definitely cursed that pool," Sha Yuan said later, breathless and limp as Luo Binghe helped them both dry. He could barely shift enough to help Luo Binghe get him dressed, practically flopping limbless onto the blanket Luo Binghe set out so they could eat something.

As much as Luo Binghe enjoyed the sex (which he did, and often—he could have lived inside Sha Yuan if he'd let him get away with it), it was these moments that really showed how much had changed.

The simple act of pulling the food he'd made out of his qiankun pouch and setting it up for them to eat was calming in a way nothing else had ever been. He smiled as Sha Yuan's eyes gleamed in desire again, this time directed at the hand-pulled noodles.

They ate in mostly companionable silence, minus the happy noises Sha Yuan made as he ate. It was always a pleasure to watch his husband eat his food. He wasn't sure anyone had ever appreciated such simple dishes quite so much. Luo Binghe had cooked a variety of meals over the years and never had any complaints, but Sha Yuan always seemed particularly fond of the rustic meals that Luo Binghe had grown up on.

Content and sated, Luo Binghe cleared the food to be cleaned later and laid down next to his husband on the blanket. Sha Yuan drifted off more than once and Luo Binghe was content to watch him sleep while stealing a kiss now and again when Sha Yuan's lips proved too tempting.

Eventually, roused out of sleep by gentle touches, Sha Yuan cuddled up to him and accepted more searching kisses. At least to a point… "Bing-ge, *please*—I have regular demon stamina not heavenly demon stamina."

Luo Binghe huffed. It was their usual routine and Sha Yuan generally merely scolded him about being shameless and sex craved, but this time Sha Yuan's face twisted in an unfamiliar

and hesitant expression.

“What’s wrong?” Luo Binghe asked, tracing his fingers down Sha Yuan's face.

“Am I enough for yo—” Sha Yuan looked away, his dark eyelashes fluttering against his pale skin for a moment before he continued. “Am I enough to sate Xin Mo?” His voice trailed off into a mumbled, “I really should have thought about this earlier.”

“What?” Luo Binghe had not expected *that* to be the explanation for his expression.

Sha Yuan sighed. “I know you had a reason for the harem and I don’t know… is variety a factor or is it just quantity?”

Luo Binghe truly loved his husband, but sometimes….

“Darling A-Yuan,” Luo Binghe said, tipping Sha Yuan’s chin up to meet his eyes. “You’re speaking of dual cultivation.”

Sha Yuan blinked at him. “Um. Yeah?”

“We haven’t…” He desperately held back the urge to laugh, for fear of embarrassing Sha Yuan too badly and ruining the gentle affection garnered from a full day of soaking in each other’s company. “None of what we have done has involved cultivating. Dual cultivation is a specific technique.”

“Oh,” Sha Yuan’s face was slightly bewildered. It must have been strange for him to finally land on a fact he was incorrect about. “I thought it was euphemism.”

Luo Binghe had to shove his face into Sha Yuan’s neck to keep from laughing, but his shoulders shook and gave him away.

“Well, *do* you need to dual cultivate?” Sha Yuan said, with a huff once Luo Binghe composed himself.

“I haven’t needed to do that to suppress the sword for years,” Luo Binghe said, still amused. He’d gained dominance over the sword ages ago—his feeding it with energies he obtained from carnal or violent acts were merely treats at this point to a well trained dog.

Sha Yuan sat up carefully, pressing his hands to his forehead as he tried to process the information. “Why are you… then why—your sex drive is *naturally* like this?”

Luo Binghe pushed himself to one elbow and raised an eyebrow. “I didn’t think I’d been subtle about it.”

“I don’t think I can keep up with this,” Sha Yuan said, breathing out.

Luo Binghe frowned at him, seeing a slight uncertainty cross Sha Yuan’s features for no reason. He took his husband’s hand and pressed a kiss to the inside of his wrist. “As long as I can keep you, I will be happy with whatever you are willing to give me.”

“So if I wanted to not fuck for a month you’d be fine?” Sha Yuan asked, his vulnerability replaced with skepticism.

“No, I’d be insufferable,” Luo Binghe said honestly, hoping that wasn’t something Sha Yuan was seriously considering. “But I wouldn’t force you or leave if that is what concerns you.”

He felt himself frowning and wriggled closer to Sha Yuan, resting his head on his husband’s lap and looking up at him. “You wouldn’t deprive me of *all* affection of course, would you?”

Sha Yuan was very badly fighting a smile. The fondness in his eyes shone brighter than the reflective stone in the cove. He stroked his hand through Luo Binghe’s hair. “Mn, so head pats are the deciding factor in whether or not my husband finds me less than suitable?”

“You’re not going to scratch either?” Luo Binghe objected, earning the soft laugh he was after and the added benefit of both of Sha Yuan’s hands in his hair now, scratching in smooth circles against the sides of his skull.

They stayed like that for a little while and Luo Binghe considered the benefit of napping like this but he needed to make sure he had made it clear. “A-Yuan.”

“Mm?” Sha Yuan asked, staring at his own fingers still stroking Luo Binghe’s scalp.

“A-Yuan is not ‘suitable’ — my A-Yuan is everything.”

Sha Yuan’s hands stilled. He looked down at Luo Binghe with a well of emotion that meant he’d been sitting on this for a while. Luo Binghe couldn’t believe he’d missed it or that his husband had needed the reassurance when all Luo Binghe regretted was that he hadn’t had *more* of him sooner.

Sha Yuan gently kissed Luo Binghe’s forehead and then leaned his own against him. He sighed, light and slightly despondent. “Okay, but if we’re going again you’re using the blood parasites *and* giving me a massage later.”

“As my husband wishes,” Luo Binghe said with a grin, easily flipping their positions so he was pressing Sha Yuan against the blanket.

End Notes

Sha Hualing describing a whole ass adult: Ah my babiest of all baby cousins got distracted at a bookstore today. He is ridiculous and needs a nanny.

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